

# DIGITAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology 254 | Winter 2022 | Course Code 60770

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Meets Tuesdays, 11:00–1:50pm (first meeting: Tuesday, January 4, 11am)

The goal of this course is to collaboratively approach “the digital” from an anthropological perspective. This will take two forms: first, exploring ethnographic research on digital culture (from a range of disciplines); and second, using anthropological theories and frameworks to explore the digital and the human. There is an emphasis on anthropological and/or ethnographically informed work. However, the texts are interdisciplinary, drawing particularly on history and communications: during the course we will link such work to digital anthropology. There is by now a massive body of high-quality work on these topics, classic and contemporary, and there is no way to cover all this material within the limits of ten weeks. I have intentionally distributed themes across weeks to build intersectional conversations. The course covers topics ranging from virtual worlds to videogames and social network sites, from labor to selfhood, and from race, gender, sexuality, and class to disability. We will address linked questions of method, theory, and politics.

There are six texts each week (save Weeks 1 and 7). The placement of texts in particular weeks has no relation to their importance; not everything can be assigned in Week 1, and some of the most important texts appear in Week 9 and Week 10. The texts are not divided into “required” or “recommended.” Instead, each week you will select three of the six texts to read closely and discuss in your précis (see below), depending on your shifting interests. You are expected to read briefly the other three texts so as to participate in the overall class discussion. For Week 7 we will look at a single text, the draft of *Intelligent Visions*.

You are expected to do just as much reading on weeks you do not do a précis: choose three texts to read closely, and read briefly through the others. This will provide practice in different reading styles, an invaluable scholarly skill. In class, those who read a particular text can summarize and analyze it for others. In this way we build a supportive intellectual community while strengthening our familiarity with a range of scholarship. Course texts are accessible online, unless marked with ☒, in which case they will be made available as PDF files. Seminar discussions will follow three basic guidelines:

*Generosity.* With a ten-week course there is not time for substandard texts. All texts selected for the syllabus are insightful and theoretically innovative. If you find yourself rejecting an argument in toto, this indicates your reading is insufficiently generous.

*Provisionality.* You are allowed (indeed, encouraged) to think out loud, say something and then take it back, and speak in a provisional manner, knowing that those around you will be patient, supportive, and slow to take offense.

*Community.* Some individuals are quite comfortable speaking at length: this is desirable, but I may ask persons to wrap up their comments, or to solicit comments from anyone.

# COURSE STRUCTURE

## *1) Five Précis*

You will do five (5) précis, which we will share with each other. There is no précis for Week 1. This means you can choose four of the nine weeks after Week 1 to do a précis. It is your responsibility to ensure you complete five précis; get started early! Each précis should be 2,500–3,500 characters in length. This is approximately 400–500 words, or 1.5–2 double-spaced pages, but you will be assessed based on character count. Each précis should take the form of questions, commentary, and analysis about at least three of the six texts for that week. You may discuss more than three texts; you will not receive full credit if you discuss only one or two texts. If there is a book assigned, your précis can cover just one or two chapters of the book; for Week 7, pick 3 chapters of *Intelligent Visions* to focus on. A précis can link to earlier course texts, or to texts from outside the course, but particularly the latter of these is discouraged. I discourage negative critiques; focus on generous engagement. As noted above, you should look briefly at all texts for any particular week and be prepared to discuss them, even if you do not do a précis at all that week.

A précis must be uploaded onto the course's Google Doc before the beginning of class. A précis can never be turned in late. If you do not attend class, or leave class early, any précis you submit that day will not be counted. Each précis counts for 9 percent of your grade, so the five précis constitute 45% of the overall grade. Please note that falling even one précis short will thus severely impact your grade. You will receive only partial credit for a précis that does not meet the minimum requirements discussed above; if you do an additional précis, the grade for that additional précis can replace an earlier précis with a lower grade.

## *2) Final Project*

You will do a Final Project, for which there are three options, all worth 55% of your overall grade. By Week 7 at the latest, choose the option that will best serve your intellectual and career goals. I will be happy to help you decide. Regardless of option, the final project must be emailed by the deadline as a single Word document (not pdf) to [tboellst@uci.edu](mailto:tboellst@uci.edu). Unless you have received permission from me otherwise, the final project should be 4,000–6,000 words long, all-inclusive.

### *2a) Final project: Annotated Bibliography (Option 1 of 3)*

You can write an Annotated Bibliography for your Final Project. This will allow you to build a set of conversations between scholarship discussed in the course and relevant literatures outside the course that will aid you in developing your research. The Annotated Bibliography must include at least 8 entries from the course and 8 entries from outside the course, for a total of at least 16 entries. This should be sufficient; do not go above 24 texts. You do not need to read a work in its entirety to include it in your Annotated Bibliography—you may be drawing on a specific line of analysis. Not all entries must be discussed to the same extent. The Annotated Bibliography should not be an alphabetical listing; it should be broken into thematic sections. This will allow you to identify debates and schools of thought, and then discuss how these schools of thought might productively speak to each other. Beyond these basic parameters, your Annotated Bibliography could take a range of forms based on your own creativity; I am happy to help you find a format that serves your goals.

*2b) Final project: Sole-Authored Paper (Option 2 of 3)*

You can write a Sole-Authored Paper for your Final Project. The Sole-Authored Paper can be on any topic that relates to the course, so long as you obtain my approval and so long as you cite and engage course texts and discussions in a significant manner. This could be an opportunity to write about a topic that on the face of things may not be directly linked to your research interests, but will help inform your work in some fashion. So long as you cite and engage course texts and discussions in a significant manner, the Sole-Authored Paper could also be more directly linked up to research interests (e.g., a draft of part of a Master's thesis or advancement to candidacy documents, or a dissertation). You may use Chicago Style (used by the American Anthropological Association) or some other style you prefer (e.g., MLA style), so long as you are consistent. You must include full bibliographic references to course texts as they are used. Unlike the Annotated Bibliography option, outside texts are not necessary. You may bring in such outside texts, but they should not overwhelm or substitute for course texts. I am happy to help you develop a thesis and format for your Sole-Authored Paper.

*2c) Final project: Coauthored Paper (Option 3 of 3)*

You can write a Coauthored Paper for your Final Project. The Coauthored Paper has identical parameters to the Sole-Authored Paper, save that you will coauthor it with one or two other students in the course (coauthors must be other students in the class). For scholars in a range of disciplines, coauthorship is common form of intellectual work. However, it is often sidelined in graduate training. This option provides you an opportunity to practice coauthorship. Unless you receive permission from me, you may not have more than three authors for a coauthored paper. I have extensive experience in coauthorship and am happy to help you develop a thesis and format for your Coauthored Paper, as well as offer suggestions regarding techniques for coauthorship.

The course grade will thus be calculated as follows:

Five précis times nine points per précis	= 45 points
Final Project	= 55 points
Total	= 100 points

You will then be assigned a letter grade as follows: A+ 96.7–100; A 93.4–96.6; A- 90–93.3; B+ 86.7–89.9; B 83.4–86.6; B- 80–83.3; C+ 76.7–79.9; C 73.4–76.6; C- 70–73.3; D 65–69.9; F 64.9 and below.

Students with disabilities: to quote from my colleague Karen Nakamura's syllabus, "If you need a reasonable (or even unreasonable) accommodation, please let me know and I'll make it happen. This goes triply for folks with non-visible disabilities or who pass or mask or compensate. No need to do that here." The Disabilities Services Center has many resources; registering with them can help ensure appropriate arrangements in all your courses (see <http://www.disability.uci.edu/>).

# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Week 1

Stephenson: *Snow Crash*.

## Week 2—Watch before class: *Our Digital Selves* (<https://youtu.be/GQwo2-meoW4>).

Boellstorff: The Ability of Place.

Boellstorff: Paraethnographic Film.

Dokumaci: Disability as Method.

Nakamura: Indigenous Circuits.

Turner: Where the Counterculture Met the New Economy.

Williamson: Electric Moms and Quad Drivers.

## Week 3

Boellstorff: *Coming of Age in Second Life* (pick 1 or 2 chapters for a précis)

Davis: Memes, Emojis, and Text.

Duffy: The Romance of Work.

Fuchs: Capitalism, Patriarchy, Slavery, and Racism.

Huang: Digital Aspirations.

Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles: #GirlsLikeUs.

## Week 4

Amrute: Immigrant Sensibilities in Tech Worlds.

Beltrán: The First Latina Hackathon.

Brayne: Big Data Surveillance.

Lewis, Arista, Pechawis, & Kite: Making Kin with the Machines.

Mejia, Beckermann, & Sullivan: White Lies.

Rosenblat & Stark: Algorithmic Labor and Information Asymmetries.

## Week 5

Flores-Yeffal, Vidales, & Martinez: #WakeUpAmerica, #IllegalsAreCriminals.

Hales: Animating Relations.

Lu & Steele: "Joy Is Resistance."

Poster: Striking by Telegraph, Avatar, and Geotag.

Ross: Being Real on Fake Instagram.

Ruberg: Permalife.

## Week 6

Cote: Casual Resistance.  
Dundon: Online Dating Profiles.  
Gray: Gaming Out Online.  
Irani: *Chasing Innovation* (pick 1 or 2 chapters for a précis).  
Maurer: Blockchain.  
Walter: The Self in a Time of Constant Connectivity.

## Week 7

Boellstorff & Soderman: *Intelligent Visions* workshop.

## Week 8

Aziz: Shamelessly Cute.  
Cote: "I Can Defend Myself."  
Brock: From the Blackhand Side.  
Blacker: Strategic Translation.  
Duarte: Connected Activism.  
Seaver: Everything Lies in a Space.

## Week 9

Abidin: Meme Factory Cultures.  
Jereza: Corporeal Moderation.  
Krafft & Donovan: Disinformation by Design.  
Nair: Becoming Data.  
Ruberg & Cullen: Feeling for an Audience.  
Russworm & Blackmon: Replaying Video Game History.

## Week 10

Edwards & Boellstorff: Migration, Non-Use, and the "Tumblrpocalypse."  
Knox: Hacking Anthropology.  
Radin: "Digital Natives."  
Rea: Calibrating Play.  
Taylor: Future-Proof.  
White & Katsuno: Toward an Affective Sense of Life.

**Final Project due Friday, March 11, 5:00pm, emailed to tboellst@uci.edu.**

# COURSE TEXTS

- Abidin, Crystal. 2020. "Meme Factory Cultures and Content Pivoting in Singapore and Malaysia during COVID-19." *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 1 (July): 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-031>.
- Amrute, Sareeta. 2020. "Immigrant Sensibilities in Tech Worlds: Sensing Hate, Capturing Dissensus." *Cultural Anthropology* 35 (3): 374–403. <https://doi.org/10.14506/ca35.3.02>.
- Aziz, Fatima. 2021. "Shamelessly Cute: Understanding Gender Ambiguous Identity Performances via 'The Desi Bombshell' Snapchat Video Selfies." *First Monday* 26 (4–5). <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i4.11677>.
- Beltrán, Héctor. 2020. "The First Latina Hackathon: Recoding Infrastructures from México." *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* 6 (2): 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v1i001.32904>.
- Blacker, Sarah. 2021. "Strategic Translation: Pollution, Data, and Indigenous Traditional Knowledge." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 27: 142–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13485>.
- Boellstorff, Tom. 2020. "The Ability of Place: Digital Topographies of the Virtual Human on Ethnographia Island." *Current Anthropology* 61 (S21): S109–S122. [doi.org/10.1086/704924](https://doi.org/10.1086/704924).
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- Cote, Amanda C. 2017. "I Can Defend Myself: Women's Strategies for Coping with Harassment While Gaming Online." *Games and Culture* 12 (2): 136–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015587603>.
- Cote, Amanda C. 2020. "Casual Resistance: A Longitudinal Case Study of Video Gaming's Gendered Construction and Related Audience Perceptions." *Journal of Communication* 70 (6): 819–41. <https://doi.org/10.1093/JOC/JQAA028>.

- Davis, Christina P. 2021. "Mememes, Emojis, and Text: The Semiotics of Differentiation in Sri Lankan Tamil Digital Publics." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 31 (3): 429–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jola.12341>.
- Dokumaci, Arseli. 2018. "Disability as Method: Interventions in the Habitus of Ableism through Media-Creation." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 38 (3). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v38i3.6491>.
- Duarte, Marisa. 2017. "Connected Activism: Indigenous Uses of Social Media for Shaping Political Change." *Australasian Journal of Information Systems* 21: 1–12. doi:[10.3127/ajis.v21i0.1525](https://doi.org/10.3127/ajis.v21i0.1525).
- Duffy, Brooke Erin. 2016. "The Romance of Work: Gender and Aspirational Labour in the Digital Culture Industries." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (4): 441–57. doi:[10.1177/1367877915572186](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915572186).
- Dundon, Alison. 2021. "Online Dating Profiles, Shifting Intimacies and the Language of Love in Papua New Guinea." *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 32 (3): 229–42. <https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12408>.
- Edwards, Emory James, and Tom Boellstorff. 2021. "Migration, Non-Use, and the 'Tumblrpocalypse': Towards a Unified Theory of Digital Exodus." *Media, Culture, and Society* 43 (3): 582–592. doi:[10.1177/0163443720968461](https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720968461).
- Flores-Yeffal, Nadia Y., Guadalupe Vidales, and Girsea Martinez. 2019. "#WakeUpAmerica, #IllegalsAreCriminals: The Role of the Cyber Public Sphere in the Perpetuation of the Latino Cyber-Moral Panic in the US." *Information Communication and Society* 22 (3): 402–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1388428>.
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